
Home and State: Reflections on Metaphor and Practice

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Introduction

Tove Jansson is well known as the author of the Moomintroll books. Over the past decades some of the fiction she wrote for adults has at last been translated into English, including a number of books of short stories. In the title story of one of these books, 'Travelling Light', she depicts a man who leaves home for a life of freedom and travel, commencing with a cruise but beyond that he has no particular plans. The traveller is single and older, he tidies his flat, packs a minimal bag and consciously leaves behind personal items with emotional connections, feeling at last liberated from his life. It turns out, despite the small suitcase, that his emotional baggage is burdensome and that the dream of travelling light is illusory. What he is in fact trying to escape is his own compassion – his 'dreadful' empathy for others, his need to feel sorry for people, and his desire to rectify their problems and allay their anxieties. Leaving his physical home is clearly not an answer to this problem, despite his best efforts to remain disinterested. The first stranger he meets, a businessman who is unexpectedly sharing the traveller's cabin and who is suffering countless anxieties about his family, reconnects him to his relational and compassionate self. The traveller flees his cabin to sleep on the deck, but the next stranger, a woman in search of her son, sees a repeat of the cycle, and the story ends with the certainty that the traveller will concretely try to assist her. The story supports many meanings, notably, that it is impossible to exist in isolation from others or from one's location. The traveller cannot therefore dis-place himself. It also illustrates, perhaps, that in the end, it is impossible to leave home because the home is not only our physical location and connections, but also our own interior architecture, our own

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psychology – home is in this sense who we are. Wherever we are – whether at home or elsewhere – we are constantly caught in the tension between home and away, here and there, risk and security.

Each of the stories in *Travelling Light* tells us something different about the psychological and material dimensions of the home and I will refer to them occasionally throughout my talk, which has two sections. These sections are more in the nature of loosely connected ideas and observations than a coherent set of thoughts or argument. The first part will outline scholarly and feminist interest in the idea of home. My focus is on Anglo-centric commentary about the home, though this work has been strongly influenced by French feminism, and more generally by French phenomenology and psychoanalysis. The second part of the paper will consider the idea of home in the political and public domain. I use the Swedish concept of the state as *folkhem* or people's home as a point of departure for thinking about the much less coherent resonances of home in British and Australian public life.

The Idea of Home

Home is an evocative and fluid concept which has significance for all people across several scales of life: these scales include the self, our relationships and family, our physical resting place, our cultures, the nation, and even the planet. Home is a pervasive concept, sometimes so pervasive that we don't even notice when it is being invoked. Home, according to Agnes Heller 'seems to be one of the very few constants of the human condition' (1995: 2). It is a space, physical or metaphorical, which compresses many normative values, as well as the normalities and familiarities associated with family, ethnicity, culture and nation. Despite, or perhaps because of, its symbolic and affective power, the meaning of 'home' is clearly fluid and susceptible to multiple interpretations and manifestations (Mallet 2004; Heller 1995). Thinking about the home requires us to cross or transcend several dualisms such as those between the individual and the collective; the symbolic and material; inner psychological space and the outside world; public and private.

To take the first of these, the home is an imaginary unique to each of us – even if we share the same region, heritage, nationality and even the same dwelling, our home remains

distinctly ours because it is a dynamic and subjective relationship with all of these networked spaces. It provides our context and place of self-recognition. Home is about our own distinctive orientation in different spaces – especially our domestic space, but also beyond. As Theano Terkenli states:

The idea of home is broad and profoundly symbolic, a parameter that infiltrates every relationship between humans and the environment as humans reach out to the unknown and return to the known. Every activity or experience in which people engage to some degree affects their geographical delineation of home (1995: 325).

The relationships which form a person's home will often be very complex: when I began writing this paper, I was at 'at home' in Whitstable, thousands of kilometres from my other home in Australia which is, however, only a relatively recent ancestral home for ethnic Europeans like myself (and most of the population). Aboriginal Australians, in contrast, are already at home, but displaced legally and often physically (Spark 1999: 59; Moreton-Robinson 2003: 24, 33).

Home then, is intensely personal and subjective, but it is also a place of collective identification: it is intimately bound up with our relations with others, whether these are intimate or familial, cultural or regional. Our home is rarely just ours – only in the narrowest sense if we live alone do we have an individual home. However, when we move beyond the house as the home the collective and abstract aspect of home is unavoidable – the experience is something that we share with others as a relationship to a place and the people who inhabit it (Terkenli 1995).

Home is also both symbolic and material in its support for our identities. Iris Marion Young explains this in terms of the organisation of space and objects around our bodies and the meanings which we attribute to that physical environment. She speaks of two aspects of the 'materialization of identity in the home':

(1) my belongings are arranged in space as an extension of my bodily habits and as support for my routines, and (2) many of the things in the home, as well as the space itself, carry sedimented personal meaning as retainers of personal narrative (Young 2000: 62; see also Bachelard 1994)

Although Young is here speaking primarily of the way we organise and attach meaning to the things we own and place in our physical dwelling, the idea also passes into the world beyond the house. We may have little personal control over the physical things which confront us when we leave our house. If we do try to exercise control, this is often channelled through bureaucratic processes such as those associated with planning laws, though – for better or worse – people often oppose, resist, or ignore such regulations. The very existence of planning, heritage and environmental law is recognition of the collective value of place.

Regardless of our comparatively limited ability to shape the physicality of spaces beyond the house, we still mentally organise this external world as part of our own history, identity and personal narrative: we might attach meanings to particular places – childhood places, sites of enjoyment or distress, places we frequent – and we are also shaped by and sometimes resist the collective construction of meanings associated with public space. Agnes Heller describes this ‘spatial home-experience’ very eloquently in terms of sensual familiarity: the sounds, colours and shapes of our everyday environment (Heller 1995: 5). Moreover, we develop routines and habits which are distinctly our own. They are all constitutive of our home and our sense of identity. Needless to say, these meanings are not uniformly positive, but may be painful, conflicting, or the source of great ambivalence. And when read affirmatively, as a space of identity, relationality and security, the home – especially when linked to a region or nation – is still often defined exclusively, with a rejection of those who allegedly do not belong or were not invited.

The idea of ‘home’ has of course been deeply controversial for feminists. Feminism from the 1970s to the early 90s was especially critical of the idea of home. The private world of the home has often been seen as difficult, dangerous, or at the very least normatively and practically problematic. The physical home has been rightly seen as a primary site of oppression for many women and a place where inequality is reproduced – the home is where women are subjected to the many forms of private power of husbands and fathers and where women are expected to perform undervalued and repetitive tasks. Simone de Beauvoir, for instance, famously said about housework:

Few tasks are more like the torture of Sisyphus than housework, with its endless repetition. The clean becomes soiled, the soiled is made clean, over and over, day after day. The housewife wears herself out marking time: she makes nothing, simply perpetuates the present. (in Young 2000: 60)

As Iris Marion Young explains by reference to Heidegger, the physically constructive side of building the home is coded as men's work, while the preservation work is women's work. The former supports subjectivity, while the latter supports the subjectivity of others (Young 2000: 52). Such gendered roles in and around the home are naturalised, meaning that any transgression of these roles or resistance to performing them, whether by women or by men, can lead to social condemnation.

Gaston Bachelard turned this view of housework on its head, asking 'how can housework be made into a creative activity?' He argued that 'when a poet rubs a piece of furniture ... he creates a new object; he increases the object's dignity; he registers this object officially as a member of the human household' (Bachelard 1994: 67). Moreover, the creative and constructive role is given explicitly (and somewhat idyllically) to women:

... housewifely care weaves the ties that unite a very ancient past to the new epoch. The housewife awakens furniture that was asleep.

... A house that shines from the care it receives appears to have been rebuilt from the inside; it is as though it were new inside. In the intimate harmony of walls and furniture, it may be said that we become conscious of a house that is built by women, since men only know how to build a house from the outside (Bachelard 1994: 68).

Bachelard's account is fundamentally about making things shiny, and warm: he praises waxing and polishing furniture, shining metal objects, and making things glow. Although dusting, sweeping, and washing do rate a mention, they are somehow detached from the grime, the routine and forced servitude of de Beauvoir's account. There is no recognition of the presence of power in the distribution of roles in Bachelard's account.

The constructive aspect to homemaking ultimately resonates with Young's analysis. Although she agrees with de Beauvoir about those aspects of housework which are simply drudgery, Young distinguishes mere cleaning from homemaking as a purposive and subject-building activity: 'Homemaking consists in the activities of endowing things with living meaning, arranging them in space in order to facilitate the life activities of those to whom

they belong, and preserving them, along with their meaning' (Young 2000: 63; cf Swift 1997).

For many women, of course, the home is seen to have a positive value associated with safety and the development of a secure identity and positive acts of nurturing. But there has been much disagreement over whether norms associated with the home are useful in describing political space. Feminists have been sceptical of the privilege, nostalgia and search for unity associated with these ideas and the separation from other women that they entail. Bonnie Honig, for instance, argues that 'The dream of home is dangerous' because it encourages people to suppress their own differences in a desire for unity, and 'engenders zealotry'. She adds 'It leads the subject to project its internal differences onto external Others and then to rage against them for standing in the way of its dream – both at home and elsewhere.' (Honig 1994: 585).

Both Rosi Braidotti and Teresa de Lauretis argue that feminists need to leave our intellectual, personal, and cultural homes: to live on the margins as eccentric subjects or nomads, and reject the ideal of safety which a normative home promises (Braidotti 1994; de Lauretis 1990). Braidotti positions feminist identity and epistemology as 'nomadic' – never at home, always restless, and living on the margins, a position which echoes postmodern philosophy's scepticism about the unified subject. As a result of these and other critiques, many feminists have been very ambivalent about using the home or values associated with it as a normative basis for feminist politics.

We can see the risks of an idealised home in another short story by Jansson 'The Summer Child'. Here, a family who lives in the country, and who are rather self-satisfied about their healthy and comfortable lifestyle, invite a child from the city in order to share their good fortune and the fresh air. The child who arrives, from separated parents, is oppressed by global pollution, environmental degradation, starvation, and the waste around him. He notices death in the countryside, and rather than being an appreciative addition to their home, is a jarring presence who upsets everyone with his difficult questions and unsettling behaviour. He brings the ugly world into their wholesome space and although not necessarily a likeable child, he casts light on the smugness of this normalised family. Just as

'Travelling Light' indicates that we can't simply leave home, 'The Summer Child' shows that the dream of a perfect home is also illusory and damaging to our identities.

Some feminists have sought to rehabilitate the normative value of the home, not by idealising it, or normalising it as the site of bounded identity, but rather drawing out some of its positive tones. Bell hooks, for instance, argued that the home was a site of resistance for black women in America. As against the hostility and alien nature of the external world, the home is a place of return, identification, and activism. It makes sense, in fact, that – given its psycho-political nature – the home should have completely different resonances for different groups and individuals. As Weir says:

In a world where millions of people are homeless, and millions more are refugees or immigrants whose displacement from home has emphatically not been chosen, the argument that 'home' can be understood only as a mechanism of oppression and exclusion can sound vaguely obscene. (2008: 8; cf Spark 1999: 57)

It would indeed be very problematic to deny the promise or hope of security and space in the form of home to those who have never experienced it. This is underlined by Young's own story about being removed from her home as a child. She argues that home can be seen 'as the material anchor for a sense of agency and fluid identity' (2000: 70). Young proposes four normative values which she says 'should be thought of as minimally accessible to everyone'. These are safety, individuation (or the ability to be oneself in a space in relation with others), privacy, and preservation. The value of preservation seems especially important to Young, because it values the making and renewal of meanings attached to spaces and objects:

The activities of preservation give some enclosing fabric to this ever-changing subject by knitting together today and yesterday, integrating new events and relationships into the narrative of a life, the biography of a person, a family, a people. (Young 2000: 65)

Some of this knitting of today and yesterday is seen in yet another of Jansson's stories, entitled 'Shopping'. In this story a city has been devastated by war, earthquake or some other natural disaster. A woman whose partner was badly injured in the devastation maintains a sense of home by creating connections with their past lives and by normalising the horror. For instance, each day she goes out 'shopping' at deserted supermarkets which

are being similarly raided by other survivors. She tries to make the home 'cosy and snug' and shuts out the danger by sealing them inside. She does routine tasks like washing up and taking out the rubbish. Although the fiction can only be maintained for so long, we see here the importance of finding home in places of danger, and normalising the irregular.

Young and others argue that it is too simplistic simply to reject the ideal of home because it represents a safe, privileged and secure identity which is based on exclusion. This is because that very security may be a necessary condition or 'anchor' to drive an active, fluid, and purposeful subjectivity. This observation applies whether we are thinking literally of dwelling spaces and 'rooms of our own' or intellectual and political spaces. As Sara Ahmed and her co-editors in *Uprootings/Regroundings* suggest, some theory became captive to 'presumptions that rootless mobility is the defining feature of contemporary experience and that it stands against any form of "rooted belonging"' (2003a: 2). Since the late 1980s, theory has strongly valorised and even 'romanticised' fluidity, mobility, flux, dynamism, diaspora, and change. As Ahmed et al. point out, 'Being grounded is not necessarily about being fixed: being mobile is not necessarily about being detached' (2003a: 1).

Of course, a good home is not necessarily a clearly-bounded and uniformly cosy haven where harmony prevails effortlessly. It is a place of negotiation, dialogue, and sometimes productive conflict. A home can be 'provisional or in flux' and 'permeable and unstable' (Mallett 2004: 70). Understood in this light, the home is a process constitutive of an attachment to place and people, but not simply a defined or stable dwelling or location. For this reason, Alison Weir has argued that we can productively use the value of home in a public or political context if we maintain an awareness of what others have called the dialogic or agonistic nature or political connections.

In particular our political homes – including our identity politics – might be seen as places where we engage in the risk of connection with each other, in the conflictual, messy, dangerous, and intimate work of engagement with each other – engagement in dialogue, in arguments, in struggles, in openness to vulnerability, to critique and self-critique, and to change with a commitment to solidarity with each other that mediates our commitment to our shared struggles. (Weir 2008: 8)

As a political value, home may be a useful concept because it promotes a sense of connection, common purpose, and material wellbeing, rather than a normative

individualism and competitiveness. At the same time, the process of contestation in constructing and maintaining a home must not disappear from view. The feminist commentary seeks to transcend the public/private divide in some way by connecting the interior psychological world of identity formation with the creation of political spaces. The normative layers of the home are a powerful way to do this while challenging a more individualist ontology. However, it seems to be yet another imaginative leap into thinking about political institutions, and in particular the state, in this way (but see Stivers 2005).

Home and Public

The concept of home is therefore intensely personal, but part of the attachment which people have to an idea of home is about shared identities and a collective imaginary as a people and in some contexts an intellectual and political space. In its uncritical and idealised form, it can be a highly problematic concept, which obscures violence and disempowerment. But as an aspiration, a site of unique attachment to place, and an agonistic process, home may have more promising normative potential – if the critical edge of these values can be maintained. But what happens to the home when it becomes part of a specifically formal *political* landscape? In a sense, home is *always* about the political, because it so strongly engenders ideas of place, belonging, and identity which are shared with some people and denied to others. Agnes Heller, indeed, wrote of the US constitution as a home or place of collective democratic identification for the American people, just as the confluence of history, nation, culture, and tradition provides a home for European peoples (Heller 1995: 11-14; cf Garcia 2012). ‘Home’ is frequently invoked to refer to the nation and a unified national identity, often with a spoken or unspoken division between ‘us’ and ‘them’. It is political because its resonances, whether to do with public and private, construction and preservation, or production and reproduction, are so thoroughly gendered. But beyond this material and affective politics, does the home have a more concrete political meaning as an explicit image or explanation of the *state* and government as opposed to the nation? Does it have any resonance with the institutionalised or constitutionalised aspects of state?

Looking at this question from the angle of the history of political ideas, it may appear that the ancient distinction between home (or at least household) and state has, over time, been overtaken by a modern seepage of certain elements of the domestic into the public sphere (as well as the more recent politicisation of the personal within feminist thought). This history is diagnosed by Hannah Arendt as a story about the emergence of a social domain which crossed the once clear divide between household and city state. In Aristotle, Arendt explains, the *oikos* or household is the domain of necessity and need, while the *polis* is the realm of freedom. The household is a unified realm ruled in a monarchical way by a single leader (Aristotle 1962: 37) and is based on inequality (Arendt 1958: 32) while the political sphere – consisting as it does of free people (men) is a plurality (Aristotle 1962: 56-57) based on equality. The notion of ‘political economy’ – which places the idea of the household with its (domestic) economy into the political sphere – was systematised by Adam Smith and, according to Arendt, was part of a larger movement in which the concept of free action in the public sphere was supplanted by social ‘behaviour’ within mass societies (resulting in the systematic accounts of Smith and then Marx). Put simply, ‘mass society’ and the ‘social sciences’ with their emphasis on regularised behaviour rather than free action were born, and the boundaries between *oikos* and *polis* unavoidably blurred (Arendt 1958: 42 n35).

We see the body of peoples and political communities in the image of a family whose everyday affairs have to be taken care of by a gigantic, nation-wide administration of housekeeping. The scientific thought that corresponds to this development is no longer political science but ‘national economy’ or ‘social economy’ ... all of which indicate a kind of ‘collective housekeeping’; the collective of families economically organized into the facsimile of one super-human family is what we call ‘society’, and its political form of organization is called ‘nation’. (Arendt 1958: 29)

Arendt’s point is that the public domain, understood as the site of individual freedom, has been taken over by mass society and its preoccupations with production and consumption, leaving little space for pure political action and political speech.

From another political theory angle, however, a different story emerges: the multiple referents of the public-private distinction are well known and if Arendt’s modern political ‘public’ is a shadow of its ancient self, there are other ‘publics’ to take its place. Both historians of political thought, and social historians have shown a widening from the

seventeenth century to the twentieth of both symbolism and practice in the realms of the public and the private. In the seventeenth century it was common for political theorists to analogise from the household/family to the state, particularly in defence of the patriarchal and absolute authority of the monarch, and the natural state of subjection of citizens to kings, and wives and children to husbands (Filmer 1680; cf Butler 1978; Amussen 1988: 54-58). A more liberal turn of theory, developed by John Locke and others, broke this analogy but, ironically, removed for some centuries the question of gender from political theory (Butler 1978) while preserving the assumptions of patriarchal thought in the male image of the free and equal subject (Brennan and Pateman 1979). Everyday relations between women and men no longer informed political theory (for better or worse) and while relations between the sexes were perhaps seen as more equal by Locke than by Filmer, women were notoriously removed from the political contract and confined to an increasingly segregated household domain (Pateman 1988). A strengthening of the, in particular middle class, 'home' as a sentimentalised and separate realm of attachment (Okin 1982; Davidoff and Hall 1987: 357-396) only underlined the irrelevance of gender for the political. The patriarchal and paternalistic state, with all the resonances of a hierarchical family and home, was again theorised by feminists of the 1970s and 1980s. This time the family-state connection was analysed in order to uncover and critique concealed power but was quickly overtaken by the more postmodern turn of theory which dismantled the unitary concept of state and associations with patriarchy (Brown 1992).

Thus, Arendt analyses the conceptualisation of the nation as a household as a symptom of the decline of a true public sphere and the rise of mass society. By contrast, other scholars have emphasised the severing of the household-state analogy in political theory and the associated rise of the private 'home', as the idealised realm of love, normative families, and affective relationships. The two narratives appear to conflict, though they are perhaps simply different threads in a conceptually pluralistic movement towards modernity. Moreover, they are obviously generalisations which are socio-culturally located – as we will see, the public-private distinction championed by Locke didn't open up in Scandinavia in quite the same way as it did in the Anglo countries.

In this section, I want to tell three further stories about the relationship between the home and the state, which are related to these narratives, but not reducible to them. The first concerns the Swedish notion of the *folkhem* or the home of the people, an idea which in some ways neatly captures Arendt's image of the state as a 'gigantic' household. The second concerns the historical development of the British state as a bureaucratic expansion of the monarch's household. And the third concerns the Australian repudiation of home in the state's constitutional foundations – a repudiation that is, of the fact that the Australian continent is comprised of multiple homelands for Aboriginal peoples.

I make no effort in telling these stories to directly compare the home-state relationship between the three contexts – they each have their own specificity and concern different aspects of a pluralistic state (ie policy-imaginary, bureaucratic, constitutional) and different concepts of home. Each story is, moreover, only a fragment of much larger and more complex narratives. The stories are, in a sense, a triptych in which each of the frames deals with a common theme, but which cannot be overlaid or compared – to attempt to do so would be highly artificial and reductive, and so I prefer to leave the narratives in their inchoate, suggestive, situations.

Sweden

The Swedish concept of *folkhem*, or the state as the home of the people, is the key inspiration for this paper, although as much of the extensive literature is in Swedish, I will say very little about it. It is more of a jumping off point for thinking about the state in relation to the home. I was introduced to the idea of the *folkhem* when I first visited Sweden for the last three months of 2000 and was instantly struck by the image of a political home and the principle of solidarity which underlies it. *Folkhem* has been a core part of social democratic politics and welfare state policy in Sweden for 80 years, though its origins are much earlier (Hobson and Lindholm 1997: 490). Erik Ringmar describes *folkhem* as a metaphor and a 'moral project', which brings together the ideas of family, security, equality, and justice:

The state provided a 'safety net' which protected people from the cradle to the grave. The metaphor 'Sweden is a home of the people' (*folkhem*), launched by the Social

Democrats in the 1930s, captured the idea well. Just like a family, the state cared for everyone who lived under its roof and made sure that everyone was properly fed, clothed and educated. The *folkhem* also guaranteed justice and equality: everyone should get their 'fair chance' and fair chances, it was believed, could only be guaranteed by the state. (Ringmar 1998: 48)

The state as the home of the people has been the central metaphor of the Swedish welfare system. The state holds responsibility for sheltering and sustaining the population (Hirdman 1994: 77; Hobson and Lindholm 1997) and beyond that, tries to embed a material equality throughout the labour market and social welfare system (Johansson and Jansson 1998). *Folkhem* is associated with a weaving together of the imagery of the (enlightened) home with that of the state and deliberately instrumental efforts to change the fabric of society into an egalitarian model (Hirdman 1994). Normatively, the *folkhem* appears to place responsibilities on the state for the material wellbeing of the population rather than assume that most things can be taken care of by the economy. It was therefore a decidedly social democratic concept which resonates with Young's emphasis on the home as the place which secures the material conditions of identity and political agency.

Interestingly, in her discussion of the conceptualisation of the polity as a household through the notion of social economy, Arendt refers to the economist Gunnar Myrdal, in particular his book *The Political Element in the Development of Economic Theory* [1954]. Alva and Gunnar Myrdal were influential in the development of the Swedish welfare state and its particular approach to state feminism, its depiction of the polity as a family responsible for the care of the citizens, and its quite explicit and radically rationalist social engineering (Olsson 1991; Hirdman 1994: 76). Gendered social engineering and in particular creating the motivation and support for women to participate equally in the labour market was seen by Alva Myrdal in particular as the rational basis for countering population decline (Hirdman 1994: 83-84). As we have seen, post-Locke, liberal theory strongly differentiated on anti-patriarchal grounds between the domain of home and family, and that of the state. One consequence was a conceptual closure of public political space to women. Gender simply became irrelevant in liberal political theory. By contrast, Sweden did not fully differentiate between public and private and one consequence of *folkhem* rhetoric was a space within the state for women's participation – at least after the 1930s. 'For Swedish feminists in the

1930s, the *Folkhem* was a discursive resource that gave them a certain legitimacy, but also allowed them to represent their claims for more participatory citizenship.’ (Hobson and Lindholm 1997: 491)

The *folkhem* concept has also unsurprisingly been criticised and contested: for instance its more general ideology has been associated with the sterilisation project of the 1930s and 1940s (Runcis 1998). Moreover, according to Yvonne Hirdman, it retained certain gendered and heteronormative structures even while outwardly promoting equality (see also Johansson and Jansson 1998: 406-409). It was undoubtedly a homogenising and normalising force, with the Indigenous Sami people holding no acknowledged status within it, other than that accorded equally to all Swedes. Efforts to modernise the concept so that it acknowledged multiculturalism and environmental needs were made in the 1990s. However, *folkhem* has also been appropriated very recently for a more conservative, nationalistic and xenophobic agenda (Hellström and Nilsson 2010: 62-63) and associated with an idealised cultural Swedishness set against a threatening (non-Swedish and migrant) other (Norocel 2010: 173-176). These developments are a reminder of the dangers of the idealised home and the rhetorical flexibility of the concept: as we have seen, its multiple and ill-defined normative contours mean that it is highly contestable in political discourse.

Britain

The idea that the state is a home to the people sounds very strange to the liberal ears of those of us brought up within an Anglo context, despite widespread pre-liberal theories justifying absolute monarchy by reference to family relationships. We are accustomed to thinking about the state in corporeal terms, as a body politic – which is no more rational than seeing it as a home, though more normalised in the context of Anglo philosophy. We are equally accustomed to generalised talk about home as a geographical region, abstract space of identification, or even nation. But the idea that the *state* is a home or a place of personal attachment is not one which is any longer familiar or easy to understand.¹ There are obvious reasons for this, based in the theoretical developments already mentioned, the

¹ This is despite Heller’s compelling analysis of the US constitution as a kind of ‘home’, which is a very liberalised and implicit connection.

ensuing liberal suspicion of the state, a belief that it is a necessary evil, scepticism about governments, and an ingrained individualism which often leads to competition rather than solidarity between citizens. These are generalisations, of course, and can differ widely in degree across the Anglo world.

Is there, nonetheless, any evidence for imagining the political entity through the idea of the home? To begin with, and perhaps trivially, we could point to some semantic residues of the house (though not necessarily the 'home') in British parliamentary and administrative terminology: a cabinet is a little cupboard, as well as the inner circle of ministers of the state; a house is a dwelling place as well as a legislative assembly; a chamber is a room, in particular a bedroom, as well as one arm of a legislative body; privy names a private or secret place – in the home a toilet, and in the government an inner council of advisers or judges (cf Bryson 2011: 99-100). These references perhaps do not mean much in the present context but they are relics of the fact that medieval government in Britain was embedded in the monarch's household and also that the names of the physical spaces of actual houses were invested with political meanings (Tout 1920: 71; Elton 1953: 11-12). (On the other hand, several once powerful institutions or offices – the wardrobe and the 'groom of the stool' – moved from a public and administrative to a private significance or complete redundancy (Tout 1920; Starkey 2008: 243-244; Elton 1953: 12).)² The English monarch's intimacies, secrets, and domestic life were once entangled with the political structure, and gradual – though not total – segregation has left a semantic mark on the modern state structure (a history which it presumably shares with other constitutional monarchies). Despite waves of modernisation and reform, the underlying constitutional system arguably still owes much to the expansion in powers of one particular household, buttressed by a variety of other noble families, all of which continue to be defined by male primogeniture. Far from a non-gendered liberalisation of the public sphere, at its heart it retains a privileged 'private' arena of aristocratic and royal paternalism. Even now, the official residences of Prime Ministers and Presidents are often the sites of identification and networking for families of leaders across the globe. Such houses and homes in some

² Tout describes the change of the wardrobe and chamber from being places to being institutions (69). The chamber and chamberlain remained institutions of the state, though underwent numerous transitions, while the wardrobe contracted.

historical and even contemporary sense do represent some merging of home and state. However they are not, as in Sweden, homes of the *people* but rather homes of the elite – if there is a coming together of home and state here, it is a decidedly top-down association.

In addition to physical houses, there are some other reminders of the home-state connection in Britain. For instance, the powerful Home Office is a government department with a collection of responsibilities now centred on law and order. The terminology which associates a government department – and traditionally the most important one – with the home feels unfamiliar from the Australian perspective, though there is in Australia a lesser known, intermittently named, and more junior ministerial portfolio of ‘Home Affairs’. Unsurprisingly, the existence and nature of the British Home Office is above all historical. The Home Secretary is, like many aspects of the British state, also essentially a product of the monarch’s household: she is the successor of the King or Queen’s secretary, a person who, like the privy, was originally concerned with private matters or secrets. When the Home Office was created in 1782 there were just two Secretaries of State, the Home Secretary, who was the senior office-holder, and the Foreign Secretary (Troup 1925; Newsam 1954). The Home Secretary’s business was essentially all matters of internal governance, including that of the colonies (Newsam 1954: 25) and therefore essentially to do with domestic affairs. Over the next century the home office and its secretary accumulated a fantastic array of responsibilities to do with factories, crime, prisons, explosives, mines, rudimentary welfare (poor laws), workers’ compensation, drunkenness, cremation and other matters (Troup 1925: 23-24). It is a bizarre and illogical collection of responsibilities, which were also gradually removed to other departments as they outgrew the scale of one office. As Troup observed, the disconnection between the historical responsibilities of the Home Office was (and perhaps still is) explained by the fact that it was the default location for any new domestic governmental role (Troup 1925: 24).

Mid-20th century texts about the Home Office emphasise its role in the maintenance of order – it was seen as primarily the guardian of the Queen’s Peace. This was cast in classically liberal terms by one permanent secretary, who wrote that its ‘essential task ... is to maintain, in a world that seems to pay a diminishing regard to such a principle, the widest possible liberty consistent with law and order; and if the Home Office be assailed as an

anachronism, the British people stand indicted too' (Newsam 1954: 18). The current Home Office has responsibility for migration and border control, crime, alcohol and drugs, counter-terrorism, police and, somewhat unfathomably, equality and animal research. It is essentially responsible for the maintenance of British order, safety and Britishness. Above everything else, the Office promotes itself as responsible for the safety of the public, and in this sense it maintains the core principle of earlier times. As Stivers points out in the US context, the deployment of home in this sense is hardly reassuring and indeed perverse: 'Talk of homeland security makes us feel less at home, not more' (Stivers 2005: 37). Security discourse relies on a fostering of insecurity and suspicion between people, not their connectedness.

It would be stretching things to claim that these various reminders of the home in the British state represent any real attachment *of the people* to the *state* as a place of shelter, protection and identification. These things may be found elsewhere in the public sphere and the usual nationalistic evocations of the country or nation as a home abound here as elsewhere. The British government has not, to my knowledge, sought to represent the *state*, as opposed to the nation, as the home of the British people. David Cameron came close in February 2012 when he spoke of the Union between Scotland and Britain as defining 'the place we call home' and of the United Kingdom as a 'warm and stable home'.³ It scarcely needs mentioning that a southern Tory and a Nationalist Scot may call a very different place 'home'. Under the Labour Government, the Home Office did try to make a direct link between its work and physical homes: 'We want people to feel safe, and confident in their homes and neighbourhoods, so they can live freely, contribute to society and prosper in their daily lives.'⁴ The rhetoric under the present government is more severe, focusing on security, rather than developing spaces for people to thrive. Regardless, the Home Office is not the home of the British people, even if it sees itself as providing the basic conditions for a secure society.

³ David Cameron 'Scotland Speech' 16 February 2012: <http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/transcript-pm-scotland-speech/>

⁴ <http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20100418065544/http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/about-us/purpose-and-aims/>

The British *state* does not therefore explicitly seek to represent itself as the people's home, and nor would the people necessarily feel that the state is their home. Certainly there is no explicit ideology of this nature as there was in Sweden. Nonetheless, there are both symbolic reminders and historical residues of the patriarchal house and home in the state as well, of course, as an array of attachments and identifications which connect people and the state which reflect some of the values associated with home. We should not therefore be too quick to assert that the home is nowhere present in Anglo state thinking.

Australia

Nation-building is an ongoing process. It requires constant reinforcement of values and identity. It is not sufficient to relegate the failure to respect Indigenous peoples as equals to the vagaries of history, because that history constantly informs Australia's identity, values and governance. (Dodson and Strelein 2001: 826)

One of Tove Jansson's most troubling short stories, 'The Woman Who Borrowed Memories', describes the return of a woman, Stella, to her young-adult home after 15 years away. In her apartment, Stella had entertained artistic friends, providing spaghetti and wine to all-comers, and held regular impromptu parties. She had also included a young office worker, Wanda, and allowed her to stay in the apartment, as the housekeeper reports, 'for ages when she couldn't pay her rent'. When Stella leaves in order to pursue an artistic career, Wanda stays in the apartment and is still there when Stella returns. The home has changed, because there are no longer any parties and no-one visits the fearful and suspicious Wanda, who barricades herself behind safety chains and police locks. More disturbingly, Wanda has not only taken over Stella's home, but has completely revised its history so that it was hers all along – in Wanda's mind, they were her parties, her spaghetti, she made the bookshelf, owned the EPs, and shared a special song with the now famous artist Sebastian. She has moreover neglected to pass on Stella's address to him and other friends, and essentially taken over Stella's glittering and care-free past. On hearing Wanda's revisionist narrative, Stella becomes disorientated, feeling suffocated and unwell, because her own past – the confluence of place, time and relationships associated with that apartment – is no longer her own. When Wanda asks whether she is fearful of being robbed, Stella says 'I've already

been robbed' and leaves prematurely, feeling 'wildly and inconsolably relieved' to have escaped.

What happens when your home and your past is stolen from you? What if someone else's identity is actually defined by this theft? There is some resonance here, though not a complete analogy, with the Australian state.

As a provisional statement, it appears that while the state has through much of the 20th century been seen as the people's home in Sweden, it has a more residual, hierarchical and elitist presence in the British state – the significance of this in everyday politics is not easy to judge and, as I have said, there is no comparison here because the origin and function of the home in each case is quite different. In the case of Sweden the home is a homogenising metaphor aiming to promote equality and prosperity; in the British case it was once literally a home, or at least a household, which has been incrementally transformed into the bureaucracy of contemporary government. The white Australian state in contrast is based upon the repudiation of home or even a *double* repudiation of Aboriginal homelands as well as, in more recent times and to a limited degree, the British Empire. This latter statement may seem controversial, and indeed any repudiation of the British state as the legal 'home' of the Australia state cannot be dated to a particular moment and remains unfinished: Federation was accompanied by strenuous assertions of the *non*-independence of Australia from Britain, and incremental legal developments since that time have never resulted in a final, republican, separation. The Queen of the United Kingdom remains the Queen of Australia.

Nonetheless, it is clear that in Australia the state *is* essentially a historically recent construct founded upon a fictitious blank slate, which literally and symbolically extinguishes Aboriginal homelands and history while implicitly reaching out to the family of European states (in particular Britain) *and* the actual people who inhabit them. To be more precise, the foundation of the Australian colonies first involved a refusal to see that Indigenous people already occupied the country as their home, while the subsequent federation of states in 1901 involved a conscious effort to make Australia a home for white people only, by excluding Indigenous peoples from the process and document and by enabling

discrimination against other 'races'. As is well known, the Australian state is built upon the fiction of *terra nullius*, the falsehood that the land was unoccupied or at least not home to anybody at the time of settlement. In the words of Aileen Moreton-Robinson:

the sense of belonging, home and place enjoyed by the non-Indigenous subject – colonizer/migrant – is based on the dispossession of the original owners of the land and the denial of our rights under international customary law. (2003: 23)

Of course it isn't only the *sense* of home and our belonging which is based on dispossession, but the definition of our state, its architecture and its institutions. Without the founding dispossession, there could have been no state. The point was underlined by Justice Brennan's (arguably) infamous statement in *Mabo* (No 2) that the High Court could not revise the law in such a way as to 'fracture the skeleton of principle which gives the body of our law its shape and internal consistency'.⁵ The conquest was an act of state, which cannot be questioned. No such respect for principle has ever been accorded to Indigenous law (Watson 2009: 35) and, in contrast, we remain quite happy to continue fracturing the shape and consistency of Aboriginal peoples, their homelands, and their laws in the name of preserving our own. Although the literal truth status of *terra nullius* has been abandoned and a system for recognition of native title set up within the Australian legal system, the state itself – its constitutional order, its institutions, etc – repeat that original denial of Aboriginal home. It is for this reason, and many others, that Indigenous peoples say they are at once at home and displaced in Australia. The Australian state is a denial of homeland, and moreover the history of removal and displacement meant a forced migration of Indigenous peoples away from their own country but nonetheless across Indigenous space (Moreton-Robinson 2003: 33; Behrendt 2009).

Moreton-Robinson describes the specific ontology of Indigenous belonging as the 'inter-substantiation of ancestral beings, humans, and land; it is a form of embodiment' (2003: 32). Or, in the words of Irene Watson:

The old people had a deep understanding that while land is our home, it is our home because it is who we are; it is home to our songs and laws that lie in the land; it is our relative; it is our grandmother and grandfather. Our ancestors are alive in the land,

⁵ *Mabo v Queensland (No 2)* (1992) 175 CLR 1, 16.

and this is in accord with saying that to sell the land is akin to selling one's own mother. (Watson 2009: 40)

Home, identity, country, law, are not differentiated as they are in Western thinking: the subject belongs to and (more than that) is a part of the land. In contrast, home under the white Australian state is imagined as ownership (involving a subject-object differentiation and hierarchy) and – as I have said – in the case of the institutional construction of the state, dispossession.

The establishment of the Australian colonies was, therefore, based upon the non-recognition of Aboriginal homelands and the perpetuation of the view that there was no solid connection between Aboriginal people and the land. The subsequent constitutional process consolidated the white European home away from home. The design of the Australian constitutional powers relating to race were based on an open strategy of reserving the nation for white Australians and the British. As one delegate to the 1897/8 Constitutional Convention stated, 'the cry throughout Australia will be [that] our first duty is to ourselves, and that we should as far as possible make Australia a home for Australians and the British race alone'.⁶ In this constitutional project, the Indigenous people were regarded as less relevant than non-white immigrants, excluded from the count of inhabitants used to determine levels of representation, and until 1967 excluded also from the federal parliament's power to legislate 'for any race', an exclusion which was not meant to provide status to Aboriginal people, but rather to ensure that the states retained power over them and could continue their various genocidal policies.⁷ The 'race power' of the federal parliament was itself premised on the – at the time obvious to almost everyone – desirability of the parliament having the ability to discriminate against all non-white people (Williams 2000: 649-650).

Both constructs – the denial of Aboriginal title and the insistence that Australia was a home for white persons only – are embedded in the Australian definition of the state (cf Dodson

⁶ James Howe, speaking at the Australasian Federation Conference – Third Session, Friday 28 January 1898, 251, available at

http://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Senate/Research_and_Education/Records_of_the_Australasian_Federal_Conventions_of_the_1890s viewed 28 January 2012.

⁷ *Commonwealth of Australia Constitution Act*, s 51 (xxvi).

and Strelein 2001). The 1967 constitutional amendments, which aimed to equalise the status of Indigenous peoples, preserved these basic constitutional foundations. As Dodson and Strelein comment: 'The amendments ... did not recognise Indigenous peoples within the Constitution so much as make the text completely silent on the place of Indigenous peoples in Australian legal and political structures.' (2001: 830) The Federal parliament still holds the power to discriminate on the basis of race under s 51 (xxvi) though since 1967 the power extends to all races and does not exclude Aboriginal people.

Any critical understanding of the Australian state must therefore be based on the recognition that the state is based on a denial of Aboriginal homelands. The state is still legitimated by an ongoing *refusal* to remember the time before the conquest, notwithstanding a few mechanisms by which Indigenous laws have been brought into mainstream Australian law. The basic structures of the law and the state are founded on a foreclosure of Aboriginal pre-existence in the Freudian sense where 'either the external world is not perceived at all, or the perception of it has no effect whatever' and in which the 'ego creates, autocratically, a new external and internal world' (Freud 1986: 564). The question which remains open is whether there are any prospects for rehabilitating the state-home connection in non-Indigenous Australia? Are we able to construct a more positive home-state imaginary which explicitly recognises the ongoing denial of Aboriginal homelands but articulates a responsive, reconstructive, and decolonising position towards this history? And could it be done in such a way as to avoid the pitfalls of nostalgia, xenophobia, or reinforcing the self-satisfied nature of those who are already empowered?

Only in recent decades has there been any real attempt to come to terms with this history and to base our understanding of the Australian state upon an acknowledgement of prior occupation and ongoing custodianship of Aboriginal country. The latest effort is to be found in the recently passed *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' Recognition Act 2013* which provides:

3 Recognition

(1) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, recognises that the continent and the islands now known as Australia were first occupied by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

(2) The Parliament, on behalf of the people of Australia, acknowledges the continuing relationship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples with their traditional lands and waters.

This provision is part of a temporally-limited legislative, rather than constitutional response: in addition to the statement of recognition, it simply provides a process for a review of the readiness of the Australian people to support a referendum on constitutional recognition. The statute will lapse within two years, and hence cannot be a permanent source of recognition. Such provisions do begin a process of legal reconciliation without going so far as to state explicitly that the country is the 'home' of Indigenous people. Until such time as there is a constitutional change which reconstructs the foundation of the state as the home of Indigenous Australians, it will clearly be incomplete.

Conclusion

I have considered only three contexts and the shape and history of each of these is quite different to the others. Neither Britain nor Australia has embraced the state-home connection in the way that Sweden once did. Nonetheless, and despite liberal efforts to maintain the distinction between public and private, the concept of home appears in many senses to be inexorable. It emerges in unexpected places, whether that is the bureaucracy, the constitution, or a unifying policy, as an element of the construction of the state. There are few generalisable normative consequences which can be derived from these observations, though, as Heller says, 'the homes where one really lives and dwells, do oblige' (1995: 18).

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